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## MAUDSLAY'S ARCHEOLOGICAL WORK IN CENTRAL AMERICA

By CYRUS THOMAS

The object of the present paper is to note briefly some of the results of Maudslay's explorations in Central America, and to call attention to some of the questions suggested thereby. The paper, however, is not intended as a review of the archeological portion of his *Biologia Centrali-Americana*, being limited almost wholly to his work at Copan.

One gratifying result of Mr Maudslay's explorations is the testimony furnished thereby to the general correctness and value of the works of John L. Stephens and the drawings by Mr Catherwood. In regard to the portion relating to Copan, he says: "Almost all the sculptured monuments at Copan which were then to be seen above ground are described and figured in Stephens' work." He adds, however, "Like all other visitors to the ruins, he failed to understand the nature of the ruined structures, mistaking houses for fallen city walls, and seeing no trace of stone roofed dwelling-houses or temples" (Pt. I, Text, p. 9). The personal narrative of Mr Maudslay in reference to his researches is very brief, in fact far too brief to satisfy the desire of his readers, especially as his descriptions are clear and readily understood. Those in regard to his work at Copan, to which our notes are mainly confined, relate chiefly to the difficulties he encountered.

The ancient city or pueblo of Copan was situated on Copan river, a tributary of Rio Motagua which flows into the Gulf of Honduras. It was situated just within what is now the western boundary of the Republic of Honduras (lat. 14° 50' 30" N.), on

the right bank of the river. The valley at the point where the ruins are found is about a mile and a half in width, margined on each side by a line of hills.

In following Mr Maudslay in his descriptions and numerous and splendid illustrations, photographic and drawn, it soon becomes apparent to the reader who has studied the works relating to the archeology of Central America and Yucatan, that here we see the culmination of Mayan art and the most advanced step of Central American culture.

Although it will be necessary for the reader, in order to fully understand any description of the ruins, to have Mr Maudslay's plates, or those of the Peabody Museum, before him, yet a general idea of them may be obtained from the outline sketch of the ground plan here given (figure 15). The area inclosed in each of the outlines *A*, *B*, *C*, is elevated in the form of a terrace, from ten to

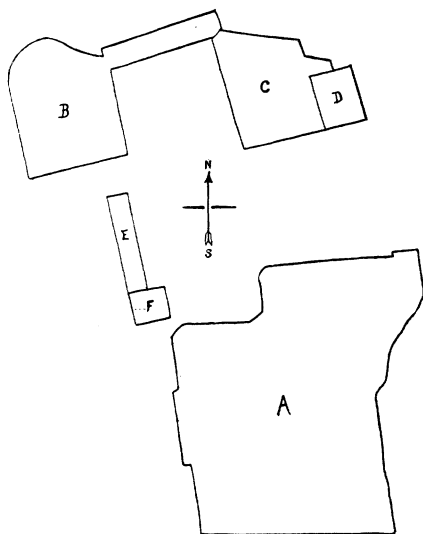


FIG. 15—Outline of the Copan ruins.

twenty feet high, generally reached by steps from the front (facing portions) and sides (except the eastern side of *A*, the base of which is washed by the river). *D* and *F* are pyramids, and *E* an elongate ridge, probably the débris of ruined houses. It was

on these three chief terrace groups that most of the structures were built. It is true that the ground between these two terraced areas (regarding *B* and *C* as one), and to the west and south of *A*, and even to the north of *B*, *C*, is dotted with remains, but they are of comparatively small size, consisting chiefly of detached small or moderate-sized pyramids, buildings, monoliths, etc.

The large terrace, *A*, was evidently the heart of the sacred city, the area on which the chief labor of the native builders and artists was bestowed. As we follow Mr Maudslay while he slowly and laboriously plows his way into the bowels of the forest-covered mounds, viewing in his excellent photographs the sights he beheld as the covering of earth and débris was removed, it is difficult to realize the fact that all this is the work of native American artists, and not the crumbling temples and palaces of the Orient.

As typical of the art displayed in the works at this place, Mr Maudslay's discoveries in one of the so-called temples may briefly be noticed.

In Part I of the plates relating to Copan, following the maps, plans, sections, and photographs of the group and separate ruins, Mr Maudslay begins the detailed illustrations with the temple numbered 11, located on the northwest corner of terrace *A*, the chief point of interest being the inner doorway. In his explanatory notes, he says: "To the south of the Great Plaza [the open space between the terraces *A* and *B-C* in our figure] there arises [going southward] a broad stairway, which, as it ascends the slope, divides into three separate flights of [stone] steps, each narrowing toward the top. The spaces between the steps appeared to have been highly ornamented, and the carving (Plate IX *b*) had probably fallen from that position. The steps on the right and left lead to level terraces, and the center flight must have led to the temple (No. 11) which stood at a still greater elevation. This building presented the appearance of a formless

heap of stones, out of which a huge ceiba tree was growing. Some portions of the chambers which are shown in the accompanying plan were excavated. The porches on each side probably extended some distance beyond the line of the walls of the building. The roof and superstructure had entirely disappeared, but the inner wall was in places perfect up to the spring of the vault." It may be assumed that the ceiling was in the form of the triangular or inverted V-shape vault, as at Palenque, although it is not shown by Mr Maudslay's figures, as the roofs had fallen.

The first portion of the doorway—a kind of entry or short hall—which he notices, is "a step about eighteen inches high and eighteen feet long, formed of two blocks of stone, projecting in front of the inner doorway; the face of this step is ornamented with a number of figures seated cross-legged and covered with elaborate breast-plates and other ornaments in sharp and well-preserved carving."

Examining the splendid autotype (Pt. I, pl. 8), it is seen at a glance that the figures on this step are almost exact repetitions of those on the altar found at the same locality, which may be seen by those who do not have Maudslay's figure, in Stephens' plate.<sup>1</sup> The heads are covered by the same turban-like caps, the breast is covered with similarly ornamented breast-plates, the figures sitting cross-legged on hieroglyphics and arranged in two groups facing the middle. On the step are twenty personages in two groups, the ten on the left facing the right, and the ten on the right facing the left. On the altar there are but sixteen figures, four on a side. Between the two groups on the step are two short columns of glyphs.

What the scene is intended to represent we have, at present, no satisfactory means of judging. That the figures do not portray warriors or military personages may be assumed from the fact that they bear no arms or military insignia, and that nowhere

<sup>1</sup> *Travels in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, I, pp. 42, 43.

in the entire ruins, so far as they have been examined, has anything indicative of war or strife—unless the condition of the ruins furnish it—been found. The city was probably a religious center. The figures may be symbolic, and those on the step, numbering twenty, might be supposed to represent the twenty days of the month or twenty of the periods called by Mr Goodman “*ahaus*”—the 360-day period or third order of units. The fact that there are only sixteen on the altar might seem to controvert this suggestion, but it is a fact that, although it takes twenty of the 360-day periods to make the next higher period, in the representation of these on Stela J of the same locality but sixteen are given. This at best is but a mere suggestion, yet in favor of the supposition that they may represent the days, the breast-plate of one of the figures bears clearly and distinctively the symbol of the day *Ik*. Be this as it may, it becomes more and more apparent, the more we study the inscriptions, that they contain nothing historic, and are to a very large degree symbolic, time counts being the leading subject.

We notice in regard to Mr Maudslay's figures of this step that in the autotype Pl. 8 the ten personages on the right half are all shown, some, it is true, being imperfect in lacking certain portions of the body, but all the figures are there; while in the autotype Pl. 7*a*, showing one side of the doorway, including the right half of the step, the third and fourth figures (counting from the middle toward the right) are entirely wanting, the photograph apparently showing a break or scaling here in the stone.

Although the figures may, as suggested, be symbolic, yet there is such a strongly marked facial type as to render it probable that the artist drew in part at least from life. Judging by the skeleton head at one end of the step and the tail-piece at the other, the portion on which the figures are carved is to be regarded as the body of the animal or monster. Another step of this temple shows an animal, or rather dragon form, apparently of the saurian type.

Parts of the cornice of the above-mentioned doorway, shown in Maudslay's Pl. 7, indicate very elaborate ornamentation, mingled with which, as on the step, are numerous hieroglyphs. In the western court of the same temple was found a cross with arms of equal length, the center occupied by a cross-legged human figure.

There was discovered a doorway of another temple (16) which also has the face of the entrance step ornamented with hieroglyphics and masks, the ends being flanked by skeleton heads. Extending up the sides of the doorway and over the top is a series of carved figures, human and grotesque, worked into S-shape scrolls, the whole so carved as to represent an elongate arched human serpent, supported at each end by a stooping human form. It is probable, judging from the limited remains, that the doorway of temple No. 11 was similarly ornamented.

That they are symbolic will not be doubted. As the reader will doubtless recall like overarching forms both in native American and in Oriental mythology, we shall not enter into a discussion of the subject here. It is desirable, however, to call attention to the strong resemblance of the dragon figure found at temple No. 11, above mentioned, to the figure in plates 4 and 5 of the Dresden Codex, best shown in Kingsborough's reproduction. This resemblance is strong enough to justify the belief that the figure was a conventionalized one among the tribes of Copan and in the locality where the Dresden Codex was made. Whatever may have been the idea symbolized by a human head issuing from or being held in the jaws of a reptilian monster, it must have prevailed throughout southern Mexico and all of Central America, in all parts of which the symbol is found, reaching its greatest development, though in rudest form, in Nicaragua.

As we cannot in a brief article allude to all of Mr Maudslay's discoveries at this place, we may say in general terms that those described are typical of the others. The great monoliths and altars are well known through Stephens' works and Catherwood's pencil; but it was not until Mr Maudslay's photographs and

drawings were given to the public that the ornamentation and inscriptions could be studied critically. While we must bestow on the Peabody Museum the praise for giving, by photographic illustration, the best general representation of the ruins and the clearest description of the substructures yet produced, we must look to Maudslay for the particulars, such as the ornamentation, and above all for the inscriptions.

It is only by means of the Peabody Museum photographic illustrations that those who cannot visit the locality may obtain an idea of the immense amount of labor that must have been expended on the various structures there. From these it would seem that, in addition to the stone in the ruined structures covered by the mounds, almost the entire surface of the terraces, pyramids, and slopes had been covered by wrought stones, many of them figured. The slopes or rises to the terraces, and even parts of the pyramid slopes, consisted of stone steps, the faces of many of which were covered with carved figures including the human form, skulls, heads, hieroglyphics, etc., and where not occupied by steps the spaces were covered by wrought stone often ornamented.

When we consider that all this work must have been done without the aid of beasts of burden, wheeled vehicles, machinery, or iron implements, time enters into the problem as an all-important factor. The multiplication of hands may account for the quarrying, transportation, and laying of the unornamented stone; but we cannot suppose a like multiplication of artists possible, hence the necessity of a sufficient time element. If we could adopt the theory advanced by Mr J. T. Goodman in his monograph on *The Archaic Maya Inscriptions*, which forms one of the volumes of Mr Maudslay's series, we would have no trouble on the time score.

This author distinguishes the monuments of Palenque, Copan, and Quirigua as "archaic" when compared with those of the peninsula of Yucatan, the structures of the latter region being



erected after building in the former regions had ceased. By means of his interpretation of the inscribed glyphs, Mr Goodman estimates the lapse of time between the earliest and latest inscriptions of the "archaic" monuments at 8,383 years, the latest dating back from the present time not less than 2,300 years. This estimate will certainly afford ample time for the builders and artists, especially when we take into consideration the necessary assumption that at the date of the earliest inscription the Mayas had already reached that stage of culture manifested by their works—that stage from which apparently but little advance was made in the 8,000 years that followed. Yet, strange as it may seem, according to the theory advanced, this culture did not find its way into the peninsula until the close of this period. "We go back," says Mr Goodman, "ten thousand years and find them [the Mayas] then civilized. What other tens of thousand years may it have taken them to reach that stage? From the time of the abrupt termination of their inscriptions [which he places at 2,348 years preceding 1895], when all suddenly became a blank, to that remote first date, the apparent gradations in the growth of their civilizations are so gradual as to foreshadow a necessity for their 280,800 recorded years to reach the point of its commencement. Manifestly, we shall have to let out the strap that confines our notion of history."<sup>1</sup> The last statement is undoubtedly correct if we accept his theory; and certainly there can be, on this hypothesis, no complaint as to want of time.

Although we must differ *in toto* with Mr Goodman in regard to the age of the works, we are inclined to agree with him in reference to the cause of the apparently sudden stop in the development of culture among these nations; that while it may have been due in part to the invasion of savage hordes, the chief cause was domestic war. It is true, as above stated, that at neither Copan nor Palenque are there any indications of war or

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<sup>1</sup> Page 149.

military achievements; the warrior is unknown. The cities were evidently sacred centers, yet the calamity which overwhelmed them, or at least put a stop to their progress, if not the Spanish invasion was domestic wars or invading foes or both. The condition of the Central American tribes at the time of the Spanish advent is a problem that has not been satisfactorily solved; and a full and satisfactory account in English of the early operations of the Spaniards in Central America is yet to be written. It is only when the line between what must be attributed to them and what preceded their coming has been carefully and critically drawn that the immediately preceding condition of the tribes can properly be discussed.

Mr Goodman's important discovery of the signification of several of the glyphs of the inscriptions, and Mr Maudslay's large and clear photographic reproductions of the inscriptions themselves, enable us to give a still higher estimate of the culture of the Mayas than heretofore; they also enable us to confirm Dr Förstemann's interpretation of the high numeral series of the Dresden Codex and to understand more clearly their signification; and they serve to show the close relation of the time symbols and time systems of Copan, Tikal, Palenque, and the Dresden Codex to one another, a relationship much closer than that which has been inferred from the historical records.

However, it must be said that while this new material and the recent discoveries throw much additional light on the past of Mayan art and Mayan culture, they tend to confirm the already growing belief that this culture was limited to a comparatively few lines, chiefly architecture, art in painting and sculpture, time counting, and the time system. When it is clearly proven by the inscriptions and the Dresden Codex that the Mayan count reached to and included the sixth order of units in the vigesimal system, it gives us a high opinion of their mathematical attainments.

In conclusion it may be said that the results of the explora-

tions by Mr Maudslay, Mr Holmes, and the Peabody Museum, and the discovery by Mr Goodman in regard to the signification of some of the glyphs of the inscriptions, have thrown a flood of light on the past of Mayan culture that will undoubtedly enable other workers in this field to solve many of the problems that have so long remained unraveled.